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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 000151

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ECOWAS MEETINGS IN ACCRA: NIGER NEW ECOWAS CHAIR

1. Summary: A round of ECOWAS statutory meetings in Accra January 10-19 culminated in the 28th Summit of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government. ECOWAS heads of state unanimously selected President Mamdou Tadjia of Niger as the new ECOWAS Chairman. There was candid discussion of regional conflicts and of the need to give women greater prominence in all areas. The Council of Ministers adopted an ECOWAS Common Agriculture Policy. USAID/WARP funded many of the programs highlighted in the ECOWAS meetings. End summary.

2. On January 19, the heads of state of the 15 ECOWAS countries met in Accra to select a new Chairman and review progress on a range of issues. The summit was preceded by meetings of the Technical Committee (WAMA), Committee of Governors, Convergence Council, Council of Ministers, and Ministers of Foreign Affairs. Prior to the ECOWAS meeting, some 100 civil society representatives from the ECOWAS region met in Accra to prepare advocacy positions for the summit.

Speakers at the events highlighted several themes:

Kudos to Ghana

3. Ghana and President Kufuor received praise for its positive leadership in West Africa as two-time chair of ECOWAS. Ghana was also praised for holding free and fair elections in December, 2004, while Kufuor was commended for his work in helping resolve conflicts in Liberia, Guinea Bissau and Cote d'Ivoire.

ECOWAS Achievements

4. At the Heads of State Summit opening, ECOWAS Executive Secretary Mohamed Ibn Chambas highlighted ECOWAS'

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achievements over the years: progress toward abolishing visa requirements within ECOWAS, a Customs Union by 2008, and a single currency; launching of the West Africa Gas Pipeline and the West Africa Power Pool in 2004, movement toward a common IT backbone and contributions to regional peacekeeping. Chambas noted that West Africa had embraced the NEPAD framework and welcomed the UN's role in regional peacekeeping. However, ECOWAS members need to do more to incorporate a regional strategy into national policy frameworks, he added. Ghanaian President Kufuor also noted the region's commitment to the Millennium Challenge goals, "people-centered" policies, gender equality, and youth development. Ghanaian Foreign Minister Akufo Addo noted progress in 2004 in resolving conflict in Senegal, Liberia, Guinea Bissau, as well as the success of elections in Niger and Ghana.

More Action Needed to Reduce Conflict

5. The need for more action to reduce conflict was a prominent theme. A message read from UN Secretary General Kofi Annan noted the reduced intensity of conflict in the region and improvements in the ability of ECOWAS to manage conflict. However, the Cote d'Ivoire situation is "very tense", with some actors unwilling to act toward peace. The situations in Liberia and Guinea Bissau require sustained attention, while Sierra Leone needs to improve on progress toward peace, he said. He encouraged countries to reform their security services, fight corruption and impunity, and cooperate with civil society. He noted the region's main challenges: locusts, youth unemployment, urbanization, HIV and lawlessness.

6. Chambas praised progress in DDDR in Liberia and said ECOWAS would remain engaged in the country. On Cote d'Ivoire he praised the work of South African President Mbeki and hoped for renewed peace efforts. ECOWAS is opening an office in Guinea Bissau, with help from the EU and the Netherlands. Chambas stressed the priority of ECOWAS work related to conflicts, including creation of a Standby force, an Early Warning System, and support to elections in Niger, Guinea Bissau and Ghana.

7. Kufuor pointed to ECOWAS' successes in reducing conflict but said the "continuing intransigence" of some undermines security and progress in the entire region, urging such

leaders to "search their hearts". Ghana's Foreign Minister said there could be no military solution to the Ivorian crisis. The summit's final document called for continued international support for Liberia, reaffirmed confidence in the Linas-Marcousis and Accra II accords regarding Cote d'Ivoire (and expressed support for UN and AU mediation efforts), and pointed to the need for security sector reform and credible elections in Guinea Bissau. In his acceptance speech as new ECOWAS Chair, Nigerian President Tadjia pledged to continue with peace initiatives and urged factions in Cote d'Ivoire to work for peace.

The Economic Agenda -----

18. ECOWAS leaders adopted an ECOWAS Common Agriculture Policy covering agriculture, livestock, fisheries, forestry, and natural resource management. The goal of the policy is reportedly to boost sustainable regional food security, rational management of natural resources, and decent remuneration for agricultural operations and expansion of agricultural trade on a regional and global basis. The leaders also adopted a revised Master Plan for the development of electricity generation and transmission (with a regional electricity regulatory regime). They also agreed to accelerate the liberalization of regional aviation, including the creation of an air transport unit within ECOWAS. They also discussed West African telecommunication issues.

19. President Kufuor noted the need for a "more practical date" beyond July, 2005 for currency convergence. West Africa needs to pursue a common position in WTO meetings and reach common agreements with the European Union, he stated. He stressed the importance of infrastructure (such as a Nouakchott to Lagos highway) and of the private sector.

More Prominence to Women -----

10. Women leaders were given prominence at the opening ceremony of the Heads of State Summit. A group of regional women leaders addressed the plenary. They noted ECOWAS' support for women and urged ECOWAS to integrate women more into peacekeeping efforts. As one speaker noted, women have not been involved in ECOWAS conflict resolution because there are no female heads of state in West Africa, although she acknowledged the female Vice President of Gambia. Speakers highlighted as priorities for women in the region: poverty reduction, equal rights, peace and security, and women's health. Nigerian President Obasanjo, speaking as AU Chairman, also took note of the importance of women in Africa.

Thanks to Partners -----

11. Speakers thanked the UN, African Union, and international donors. President Kufuor stressed support from the U.S., UK, France, and the EU. He hoped development partners do not get fatigued by the region's conflicts.

Comment -----

12. Despite some disorganization and delays, the back-to-back ECOWAS meetings went well. There was significant lobbying and debate about the choice of the new Chairman. Speakers were candid about the difficulties in resolving regional conflicts and the drag these conflicts have on economic progress. Kufuor's remark about "intransigent" leaders in Cote d'Ivoire was pointed (as he made this comment, television cameras panned in on a passive Laurent Gbagbo). The acknowledgment of civil society and women was a positive development. Observers expressed some frustration at the slow pace of currency conversion and some of the other economic goals. Nonetheless, this week's meetings underscored the progress ECOWAS has made as an organization. As one advisor to ECOWAS put it to us, "a year ago, ECOWAS could never have pulled off this kind of meeting." With the exception of the trans-national road, the economic achievements cited by the key speakers at the ECOWAS meeting, including the Common Agricultural Policy, were projects that were jointly initiated by USAID and ECOWAS that have subsequently garnered support from other donors and the private sector.

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